

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 IO-13 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /090 W

-----030548 115777 /20

R 021641Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9342

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY TELAVIV

USMISSION NATO

USMISSION UN

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHEN S1946

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR GR JO SY XF

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS SYRIA AND JORDAN

REF: A. ATHENS 1508 (NOTAL), B. ATHENS 815 (NOTAL)

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1. BEGIN SUMMARY. FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS RETURNED TO ATHENS FEBRUARY 27 AFTER A FIVE DAY TRIP TO SYRIA AND JORDAN DURING WHICH THE GREEK PRESS REPORTED DAILY ON HIS ACTIVITIES. IN ADDITION TO BILATERAL QUESTIONS, THE GREEK FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSED THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST (ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE) AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (CYPRUS). ON EVERAL OCCASIONS, IN BOTH DAMASCUS AND AMMAN, BITSIOS REITERATED GREECE'S SUPPORT OF THE ARAB POSITION ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION. THE VISITS, AND, IN ADDITION, THOSE LATER THIS YEAR BY THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER TO SYRIA AND FOUR OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, CONFIDENTIAL

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REFLECT GREECE'S CONTINUING EFFORTS TO CULTIVATE ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARABS AND THE INCREASING GREEK ECONOMIC INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SEMI-OFFICIAL ATHENS NEWS AGENCY (ANA) BULLETIN REPORTED FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS' FEB 22-27 TRIP TO SYRIA AND JORDAN IN DETAIL. A MAIN POINT IN THE JOINT

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE VISIT TO DAMASCUS STATED THAT "A JOINT AND PERMANENT PEACE CAN BE ESTABLISHED (IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN) ONLY IF FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES THAT THE OCCUPATION OF FOREIGN TERRITORIES IS ILLEGAL AND THE PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT OF SELF DETERMINATION. THE TWO SIDES AGREE THAT ISRAEL SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM ALL ARAB TERRITORIES IT HAS OCCUPIED, AND THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE NATIONAL RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE." THE COMMUNIQUE ALSO EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH "RESUMPTION OF THE CYPRUS INTERCOMMUNAL TALKS WHICH WILL ENSURE THE INDEPENDENCE, TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND SOVEREIGNTY AS WELL AS THE NON-ALIGNMENT OF CYPRUS."

3. IN SYRIA, ACCORDING TO ANA, BITSIOS ALSO SIGNED AN AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION IN THE CULTURAL FIELD INCLUDING PROVISION FOR THE EXCHANGE OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND VISITS BY UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS. SIGNATURE OF A TELECOMMUNICATIONS AGREEMENT CALLING FOR AN EVENTUAL UNDERWATER CABLE LINK WAS POSTPONED "SO THAT THE TWO SIDES MAY ELABORATE FURTHER ON THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTS AND IN VIEW OF THE COMPLETION OF AN AGREEMENT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FERRY SERVICE BETWEEN GREECE AND SYRIAN PORTS" (REF B).

4. ANA REPORTS THAT PRESIDENT ASAD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION BITSIOS EXTENDED ON BEHALF OF PRESIDENT TSATSOS TO VISIT GREECE, INDICATING HE WOULD LIKE TO DO SO FOLLOWING THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER CONFIDENTIAL

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CARAMANLIS TO SYRIA LATER THIS YEAR. FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM ALSO ACCEPTED AN INVITATION FROM BITSIOS TO VISIT GREECE.

5. ON HIS ARRIVAL IN AMMAN FEBRUARY 25, BITSIOS STATED, IN ANA'S WORDS, THAT GREECE WOULD CONTINUE ITS SUPPORT FOR THE STRUGGLE OF THE ARABS UNTIL THEIR ULTIMATE VINDICATION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH UN RESOLUTIONS AND PRINCIPLES. "THIS," HE STRESSED, "IS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO GREECE BECAUSE SIMILAR UN RESOLUTIONS, WHICH CONCERN A NEIGHBORING INDEPENDENT STATE CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH GREECE, ARE BEING FLAGRANTLY VIOLATED." THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE ON BITSIOS' VISIT STATED THAT BITSIOS AND HIS HOST PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER BADRAN HAD REITERATED THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE ACQUISITION OF TERRITORY BY MILITARY VIOLENCE AND CALLED FOR THE EVACUATION OF ARAB TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN JUNE 1967. THEY ALSO EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT FOR RECOGNITION OF THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND THE

RIGHT OF EACH STATE TO LIVE IN PEACE WITHIN RECOGNIZED
AND SECURE BOUNDARIES.

6. WITH RESPECT TO CYPRUS, THE COMMUNIQUE EXPRESSED
SATISFACTION OVER RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND THE HOPE
THAT NEGOTIATIONS WILL LEAD TO A SETTLEMENT "GUARANTEEING
THE INDEPENDENCE, TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, SOVEREIGNTY
AND NON-ALIGNED STATUS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
IN ACCORDANCE WITH RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS."

7. COMMENT. KISSIOTIS' VISITS, WHICH WILL BE FOLLOWED BY
SIMILAR VISITS BY KARAMANLIS TO SYRIA, ALGERIA, LIBYA,
SAUDI ARABIA AND TUNISIA LATER THIS YEAR, ARE PART OF
THE GOG'S CONTINUING EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN ITS TIES
WITH THE ARAB STATES. IN ADDITION TO THE POLITICAL
MOTIVES BEHIND IT, AND GREECE'S CONTINUED DEPENDENCE
ON MIDDLE EAST OIL, THIS GREEK POLICY ALSO REFLECTS THE SIGNIFICANT
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AND GROWING ECONOMIC TIES GREECE HAS WITH THE ARAB WORLD. GREEK
CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES AND TECHNICAL PERSONNEL ARE PLAYING
AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN SEVERAL ARAB COUNTRIES.
SOME GREEK OBSERVERS SEE A MAJOR POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE GREEK
EXPORTS TO THE MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES, AS WELL AS A PIVOTAL ROLE
FOR GREECE IN ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
EC AND THIS AREA.
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8. WE UNDERSTAND FROM MFA SOURCES THAT FOREIGN
MINISTER KISSIOTIS WAS PLEASED WITH THE RESULTS OF HIS
TRIP. HE CONSIDERS BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA
AND JORDAN TO BE VERY GOOD. ALSO, AS A RESULT OF HIS
DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD AND THE JORDANIAN
LEADERS, HE IS MORE ENCOURAGED THAN HE HAS EVER
BEEN DURING SOME TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FOLLOWING THE
MIDDLE EAST SITUATION THAT CONDITIONS ARE FAVORABLE
FOR A SETTLEMENT THIS YEAR. KISSIOTIS FEELS THE US
HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THIS CONNECTION.
DURING HIS VISIT, KISSIOTIS INDICATED TO THE SYRIANS
AND THE JORDANIANS HE BELIEVES THERE SHOULD BE A
GENEVA CONFERENCE.

9. THE COMMUNIQUE LANGUAGE IS FAIRLY GENERAL AND
STANDARD WITH RESPECT TO CYPRUS. KISSIOTIS DOES NOT
SEEM TO HAVE HAD MUCH SUCCESS IN GETTING THE SYRIANS
AND THE JORDANIANS TO SUPPORT THE GREEKS MORE FULLY ON CYPRUS,
IN RETURN FOR GREEK SUPPORT OF THE ARAB POSITION VIS-A-VIS
ISRAEL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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From: ATHENS
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 ATHENS 1508, 77 ATHENS 815
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2945107
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS SYRIA AND JORDAN
TAGS: PFOR, GR, JO, SY, XF, (BITSIOS, DIMITRIOS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fb5488ac-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009